

IHS RECYCLING GUIDANCE

This document shares recycling and composting best practices at the Indian Health Service and gives step-by-step guidance on developing a facility-based recycling program.



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Introduction

Recycling is an important component of sustainability. Recycling reduces our impact on the environment, preserves natural resources, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions from waste decomposing in landfills. Many items can be recycled including paper, plastic, glass, batteries, cardboard, and fluorescent tubes. Composting also reduces waste by taking biodegradable or organic materials from the waste stream and breaking down the materials to make nutrient-rich soil.

This document shares recycling and composting best practices implemented across Indian Country and gives step-by-step guidance on how to develop a recycling program at your facility.

Success Stories

Below are four stories of individuals successfully developing recycling and composting programs at their facilities. The first three stories show how to recycle in areas where local recycling resources are available. The fourth story describes how a community project in a remote area got support from community partners to develop a composting program. These successes demonstrate how IHS and tribal staff are working to be more sustainable.

Santa Fe Indian Hospital: Kia Mudge, Registered Nurse, began a recycling program at the Santa Fe Indian Hospital that earned an Honorable Mention for the Environmental Stewardship Award in the 2011 Department of Health and Human Services Green Champion Awards. Ms. Mudge created the recycling program to include paper, cardboard, and plastic. She worked with many hospital departments to organize the program, including general services, housekeeping, medical, and nursing.

To begin the recycling program, Ms. Mudge asked the housekeeping department if they had the resources to support recycling. After the housekeeping department confirmed that they would support the recycling program, Ms. Mudge contacted the local government to request recycling containers.

The City of Santa Fe replaced one of the facility's regular dumpsters with a dumpster for recycling cardboard. By recycling cardboard, the hospital significantly reduced the amount of trash they sent to the landfill, since cardboard is so bulky. The City of Santa Fe also loaned the hospital several smaller recycling containers for paper and aluminum. After a few months of recycling, the hospital was able to save money from the waste disposal fees. They used this money to buy more recycling containers.

Housekeeping staff members empty the recycling containers when they are full. Because the recycled materials do not need to be sorted, the recycling program does not cause extra work for anyone. The hospital was able to decrease the amount of waste sent to the landfill and the cost of waste disposal.

White Earth Health Center: Stephen Malinowski, Custodial Supervisor, created a recycling program at the White Earth Health Center. Mr. Malinowski contracted with a local recycling company that picks up the recyclables at a minimal cost. In addition to recycling paper, plastic, and glass, staff members at the Health Center recycle printer cartridges by returning them to the cartridge manufacturer.

To reduce the bulk of recycled materials, the Health Center purchased a large paper shredder instead of using several small ones. By buying one large shredder, the Health Center reduced the amount of time spent collecting the paper and the amount of energy used. Staff members also flatten cardboard boxes so that they take up less space and are easier to store until they are ready to be picked up. Mr. Malinowski placed recycling containers in each department and office to make it easy for all staff members to participate in the recycling program.



White Earth Health Center. Photo courtesy of HCC.



Staff member recycling at the Prairie's Edge Casino hotel in the Upper Sioux Community.

Prairie's Edge Casino: Theresa Villebrun, Procurement Director at Prairie's Edge Casino (an enterprise of the Upper Sioux Community in Granite Falls, Minnesota), started a recycling program after seeing a webinar on recycling. Ms. Villebrun first received permission from the casino's upper management to start the program. Then she created a Green Team that included eight staff members from various departments at the casino. The Green Team found a vendor that offered free recycling pick-up service and free recycling containers. Because of the recycling program's success and the money saved on waste disposal fees, the Green Team has been able to increase the number of recycling containers.

To encourage casino staff members to recycle, the Green Team members make announcements to their departments about Green Team activities. They also post recycling fliers in the lunch rooms, bathrooms, and other staff common areas. Training on the recycling program is included in new employee orientation. Also, the casino creates brochures and posts signs in public areas to inform visitors about the recycling program.

As Procurement Director for the casino, Ms. Villebrun added a green purchasing program to the recycling program to make sure the casino buys more environmentally-friendly products. Green purchasing is the practice of buying products that are less harmful to environmental and human health. To support green purchasing, the casino replaced paper towel dispensers in the bathrooms with high-speed hand dryers to reduce

paper waste and increase hand hygiene. Also, casino staff members send used soap and bottled shampoos to Clean the World Foundation, which provides these items to people all over the world to prevent illness. Sending these items to Clean the World Foundation also prevents them from entering the waste stream when there is still useful soap and shampoo in the bottles.

Bemidji Area: Megan Arndt, Acting Environmental Sustainability Coordinator in the Division of Environmental Health Services (DEHS) at the IHS Bemidji Area, helped a tribal green team develop a community composting program. The Green Team received a \$16,000 grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and \$12,000 of funding from the IHS Bemidji Area DEHS program. This funding was used to build a containment area for the compost pile and to train facility operators and community members on how to compost.

During the first year of operation, the compost program helped the community keep an estimated 153,088 pounds of organic waste out of the waste stream. This prevented 28.3 metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is a harmful greenhouse gas, from entering the environment. This waste reduction is not only good for the public health and the natural environment, but this composting program helped save \$14,750 in waste disposal fees.



Containment area for composting in the Bemidji Area.



How to Start a Recycling Program

1. **Get Leadership Support**
2. **Establish A “Green Team”**
3. **Assess Your Waste**
4. **Find Local Resources**
5. **Acquire Recycling Bins**
6. **Establish Recycling Goals and Plans**
7. **Educate Staff and Visitors**
8. **Monitor and Measure Results**
9. **Develop Communication Materials**
10. **Create a Green Purchasing Program**

or department to find people who are interested in recycling. It is important for Green Team members to be excited about reducing waste and increasing sustainability at the facility. It is also important to find members who are able to commit the time and effort necessary to make the recycling program successful.

3. ASSESS YOUR WASTE: When creating a recycling program, it is helpful to know what materials you currently throw away and how much waste your facility produces. Count the number of waste containers currently in the facility, and check what types of waste are being thrown away. Often you can request a detailed receipt from the trash hauler that will include the number of waste containers, how big they are, and how often they are picked up. Knowing this information will help when creating a recycling plan because it will give you an idea of what kinds of materials can be recycled, where to place recycling bins, and how many trash cans are actually needed.

The waste assessment should be as detailed as the Area or facility can manage, and it should provide answers to the following basic questions:

- **How many dumpsters are there?**
- **How often are they picked up?**
- **Where does the trash go for disposal?**
- **Where are current dumpsters/ receptacles in the facility?**
- **And most importantly, what types of waste will you be able to include in your recycling programs?**

TIP: To begin, focus on recycling paper and cardboard. The savings from these bulky items can be significant. Once your facility can effectively collect paper and cardboard, you can move on to other materials.

Step-by-Step Guidance

1. GET LEADERSHIP SUPPORT: Having support from leadership is important for a recycling program to be successful. Programs that involve staff members and management are usually stronger and more effective than programs that do not have management and staff support. Not only does leadership support show that the recycling program is important, but it can also make it easier to get the resources needed for the program, including money and staff time. Ask facility leaders to show their support by sending emails and other forms of communication about the recycling program. Also, consider having a leadership member help with brainstorming and making decisions about the recycling program.

2. ESTABLISH A “GREEN TEAM”: It’s helpful to have a recycling Green Team or steering committee to develop an effective recycling program. A Green Team keeps the program organized and helps make sure responsibilities are shared so that no one person has too much work. Green Team members can plan recycling activities and manage the “who, what, when, and where” of recycling at your facility. Ask employees in every office

4. FIND LOCAL RESOURCES: Every recycling program needs certain resources to work properly. These include a processing center and possible partner organizations to help with costs.

It is important to find a nearby processing center where your recycled materials can be taken. First, check whether your local tribal organization, town,



Procurement Director, Theresa Villebrun, and a staff member recycling bottles at the Prairie's Edge Casino.

city, county, or state has a recycling program already established. As many of the success stories showed, local areas may have existing programs that can help you with your facility recycling program.

Depending on your location, national organizations like Keep America Beautiful may offer recycling programs. Also, tribal environmental programs, the National Park Service, regional Environmental Protection Agency offices, or the Bureau of Indian Affairs may provide recycling or grant opportunities that can help with the costs of starting your recycling program.

Sometimes, local businesses or civic groups in your area are already recycling. For example, if a local grocery store or chain restaurant recycles, it might be possible for your facility to share transportation or other costs with that organization.

5. ACQUIRE RECYCLING BINS: Once the Green Team finds a processing center, the next step is to purchase recycling containers. It is important to purchase enough recycling bins for your facility and to make sure the bins are placed in convenient areas where they will be used regularly. In a hospital, this could be where food is bought or consumed since food packaging is often recyclable. Also, waiting areas or other places where people meet are good places for recycling bins.

TIP: In most hospitals or health centers, recycling does not need to be collected from individual patient rooms and clinical areas since they do not produce much waste.

6. ESTABLISH RECYCLING GOALS AND PLANS: The Green Team should set goals, make a timeline for each goal, and decide how success will be measured for the recycling program. For example, a facility might begin recycling only aluminum cans and cardboard boxes, but the overall goal may be to expand the program to manage all recyclable materials at the facility. Once you have identified these larger goals, the Green Team can prepare a plan that explains how to meet these goals.

During this planning stage, make note of any potential challenges that could make it difficult to meet your goals, such as transporting the recyclables or getting funding for the program. As the program develops, discuss each of these challenges and brainstorm strategies to overcome them. As part of the plan, the Green Team should create a disposal schedule that provides responsibilities and timelines for collection and disposal of recyclable materials.

TIP: If the facility does not have a regular pick-up schedule, staff members should create a “waiting area” to store recyclable materials until enough materials are ready to be transported to a recycling facility. This area can be a shed or small room inside the facility that is not being used.

7. EDUCATE STAFF AND VISITORS: Educating staff members is an important part of a successful recycling program. One way to educate staff members is to organize regular employee training sessions to explain how they can participate in and improve the program.

Educating visitors on your recycling program and what materials can be recycled will save time and effort later when sorting the recyclables. Post signs near the recycling bins showing what types of waste can be recycled. Include pictures and simple wording to help everyone understand what materials can be disposed and where.

TIP: In order to encourage staff members to participate in the recycling program, you can create a recycling competition: whichever hospital floor or office recycles the most is the winner. Not only will this bring attention to the program through a fun activity, but it will also educate staff members on what materials can be recycled. Friendly competition is a great way to bring staff together to focus on a common goal. The lessons learned from the activity can make an impact even after the competition has ended.



Staff member recycling at the Prairie's Edge Casino.

8. MONITOR AND MEASURE RESULTS: Each year, the Green Team should monitor and measure progress made on the goals set at the beginning of the program (see number 6 above). For example, measuring the weight of all recycled items or monitoring cost savings. These can easily be entered into a spreadsheet to monitor whether increases or decreases have occurred over time.

Sharing recycling goals with the entire facility or Area can be excellent motivation to meet those goals. This will help staff members see the success of the facility's recycling program, recognize areas of the program that could be improved, and identify any new recycling opportunities that may have become available.

TIP: Create a way for staff to offer feedback for continuous improvement at your facility, such as a comment box or regular meetings in which staff members can voice their opinions. This open communication can help identify new ideas and share the program's progress.

9. DEVELOP COMMUNICATION MATERIALS: Start regularly sharing communication materials that explain recycling program efforts. Developing quarterly fliers, sending emails, or posting announcements are great ways to keep everyone informed. Some public websites include samples of educational materials and prepared presentation materials that can be used. Helpful websites are listed in the Resources section at the end of this document.

10. CREATE A GREEN PURCHASING PROGRAM: Part of a successful recycling program is making sure the facility is purchasing recycled and recyclable materials that are less harmful to the environment. By buying products made from recycled materials or products that can be more easily recycled or disposed of, the facility reduces the amount of waste that goes to the landfill.

Resources

- **Earth 911:** <http://search.earth911.com/>
- **CalRecycle:** <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/Recycle/>
- **National Capital Region Recycling Program:** <https://mysmartplans.gsa.gov/recycle/>
- **Tools for Local Government Recycling Programs:** <http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserve/tools/localgov/>
- **National Recycling Coalition:** <http://nrcrecycles.org/>
- **Sustainable Hospitals Program:** <http://www.sustainableproduction.org/proj.shos.abou.php>
- **10 Best Practices for Building Green Teams:** <http://www.greenbiz.com/blog/2009/12/07/10-best-practices-building-green-teams>
- **Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP):** <http://www.epa.gov/epp/>
- **Sustainability at Work Guide for Green Teams:** <http://sustainable.ufl.edu/wp-content/docs/Getting-Started-Guide.pdf>